

PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE MAMMALS OF THE BONTEBOK NATIONAL PARK

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Abstract – A check-list of the mammals known to occur in the Bontebok National Park, Republic of South Africa, is presented, including general observations.

Introduction

The Bontebok National Park, (BNP), Republic of South Africa, has received little attention regarding the smaller mammals occurring within its boundaries. De Graaff (1974) presented a list of rodents recorded from the reserve but emphasis to date has fallen on the larger game species (Barnard & van der Walt 1961; David 1973; De Graaff & Penzhorn 1976; De Graaff, van der Walt & van Zyl 1976a.) Other papers on the introduction, status and eventual removal of eland *Taurotragus oryx*, red hartebeest *Alcelaphus buselaphus caama* and buffalo *Syncerus caffer* have also been presented (De Graaff, van der Walt & van Zyl 1976b; Van der Walt, de Graaff & van Zyl 1976a; Van der Walt, van Zyl & de Graaff 1976b).

The physical environment and vegetation of the BNP have been described in some detail by Grobler & Marais (1967) and Theron (1967). The BNP is approximately 2 786 ha in extent and lies 5 km to the south of Swellendam. Height above sea-level varies from 60 m to 200 metres. Apart from the southern boundary, which is formed by the Breede River, the Park is bounded by agricultural land. Swellendam receives rain throughout the year. The BNP has an average annual rainfall of 511,2 mm (1962–1976) of which 59% falls during the autumn and winter months (April–September) and 41% falls during the spring and summer months (October–March).

For the purposes of this survey, the Park has been divided into four basic habitats *vide* riverine woodland and scrub; *Acacia karroo* thicket; renosterbos/grassland and *Protea/Leucadendron* veld. Intensive collecting in

the BNP was undertaken during 1977.12.07 to 1977.12.13. and continued less extensively thereafter. The survey of the BNP forms part of a continuing investigation by the Department of Nature and Environmental Conservation of the Cape Province into the distribution of mammals in the western Cape. During 1973 a study group of the University of Cape Town collected small mammal specimens in the BNP while additional specimens were collected by the previous warden of the Park, Mr. L. J. van Zyl.

Systematic List

Order INSECTIVORA

Myosorex varius (Smuts, 1832) Forest shrew
Bosskeerbek

One specimen was collected in rank vegetation on the east bank of the Breede River at Lang Elsieskraal camp-site. Probably occurs widely in the riverine vegetation.

Crociodura cyanea (Duvernoy, 1838) Reddish-grey Musk Shrew
Rooigrys Skeerbek

A single specimen was collected by a University of Cape Town study group in July 1973, on a rocky cliff overlooking the Breede River. No specimens have been taken during the present survey.

Chrysochloris asiatica (Linnaeus, 1758) Cape Golden Mole
Kaapse Kruipmol

One specimen has been collected at the Lang Elsieskraal campsite. Surface tunnels, presumably of this species, are found in sandy soils throughout the Park.

Order CHIROPTERA

Eptesicus capensis (A. Smith, 1829) Cape Serotine
Kaapse Dakvleimuis

Eight specimens were collected at the Lang Elsieskraal campsite where they roost, and an additional specimen was taken in the pumphouse on the east bank of the Breede River. This is the only bat species so far taken in the Park.

Order CARNIVORA

Vulpes chama (A. Smith, 1833) Silver Fox
Silwervos

A juvenile animal was collected. Individuals are sporadically observed during night trips. They are known to breed in the Park.

Ictonyx striatus (Perry, 1810) Striped Polecat
Stinkmuishond

Occurs in the BNP but is only occasionally observed.

Aonyx capensis (Schinz, 1821)

Cape Clawless Otter
Groototter

No animals appear to be resident along the stretch of the Breede River falling within the BNP boundaries but they are fairly frequently seen.

Genetta genetta (Linnaeus, 1758)

Small-spotted Genet
Kleinkolmuskejaatkat

A single specimen of *G. genetta* has so far been collected. *G. tigrina* (Schreber, 1776) could also be present. Genets have been recorded on few occasions only in the Park and then only in the riverine vegetation.

Herpestes ichneumon (Linnaeus, 1758)

Cape Ichneumon
Grootgrysmuishond

One of the authors (H.B.) has made a positive sighting of this animal close to the pump house on the edge of the Breede River. Recent records suggest that this species is more widespread in the south-western Cape than has been suspected.

Herpestes pulverulentus (Wagner, 1839)

Cape Grey Mongoose
Kleingrysmuishond

There is a small population of this mongoose in the BNP and it is most frequently observed in the Lang Elsieskraal and Ou Tuin areas. One specimen was collected.

Atilax paludinosus (G. Cuvier, 1777)

Marsh Mongoose
Kommetjiesgat muishond

Tracks are commonly encountered on the sandbanks of the Breede River and animals are infrequently seen.

Cynictis penicillata (G. Cuvier, 1829)

Yellow Mongoose
Geelmeerkat

Observed frequently in the BNP, particularly on the open renosterbos/grassland flats.

Proteles cristatus (Sparrman, 1783)

Aardwolf
Maanhaarjakkals

Seen only occasionally, but at least two are known to occur in the Park. Faeces were collected.

Felis libyca (Forster, 1780)

Cape Wild Cat
Vaalboskat

Uncommon, but at least one is known to frequent the riverine scrub between the pumphouse and Ou Tuin.

Felis caracal (Schreber, 1776)

Caracal
Rooikat

There appear to be no animals resident but individuals are seen infrequently.

Order HYRACOIDEA

Procavia capensis (Pallas, 1766) Cape Dassie
Klipdas

Restricted to the vicinity of the Breede River and is frequently seen at Ou Tuin and Lang Elsieskraal. One specimen was collected.

Order ARTIODACTYLA

Sylvicapra grimmia (Linnaeus, 1758) Grey Duiker
Grysduiker

Uncommon in the BNP and it appears to be largely restricted to the dense vegetation in the area behind Lang Elsieskraal.

Raphicerus campestris (Thunberg, 1811) Steenbok
Numbers are low but it is widespread in the BNP, only avoiding the dense riverine bush and Aloe Hill.

Raphicerus melanotis (Thunberg, 1811) Cape Grysbok
Kaapse Grysbok
Widespread in the BNP but preferring denser vegetation. Commonly seen during night trips and on overcast days.

Pelea capreolus (Forster, 1790) Grey Ribbok
Vaalribbok
A common species which is frequently encountered and can be observed throughout the Park. As many as 200 animals have been counted. The population is endemic, as are those of *S. grimmia*, *R. campestris* and *R. melanotis*.

Antidorcas marsupialis (Zimmermann, 1780) Springbok
There are approximately 100 springbok at present in the BNP and it is intended to reduce this number to 50. De Graaff and Penzhorn (1976) have adequately summarized the history of this population.

Damaliscus dorcas dorcas (Pallas 1776) Bontebok
The present bontebok population in the BNP is some 280 animals, which represents approximately 40% of the total surviving bontebok number. De Graaff, van der Walt and van Zyl (1976a) have given the history and population composition of the Park's population. The present adult sex ratio is approximately 1:1.

Order LAGOMORPHA

Lepus saxatilis (F. Cuvier, 1823) Scrub Hare
Kolhaas

One specimen was collected on the open grass flats to the east of Ou Tuin. Individuals are observed on the open plain and in clearings close to the river but nowhere are they numerous, although the population appears to be on the increase. The presence of *Lepus capensis* Linnaeus 1758 is doubted.

Order RODENTIA

Cryptomys hottentotus (Lesson, 1826) Common Mole-rat
Gewone Grysmol

Only one specimen was taken, at Lang Elsieskraal, but mounds are numerous throughout most of the BNP, particularly along the Breede River and the sandy areas of the lower lying plain. More intensive trapping may reveal the presence of the Cape mole-rat *Georychus capensis* (Pallas, 1778).

Hystrix africaeaustralis (Peters, 1852) Cape Porcupine
Ystervark

Tracks, droppings and quills have been observed throughout the Park. Though apparently fairly numerous in the BNP and causing considerable damage to the fences, they are only infrequently observed at night.

Saccostomus campestris (Peters, 1846) Pouched Mouse
Wangsakmuis

Its presence in the Park was reported by De Graaff (1974). No specimens were collected during the present survey.

Aethomys namaquensis (A. Smith, 1834) Namaqua Rock Rat
Rooiveldmuis

This rodent occurs in rocky areas in the vicinity of the Breede River. Probably common in suitable habitat.

Praomys verreauxi (A. Smith, 1834) Cape Mouse
Kaapse Muis

One specimen was taken amongst rocks at Ou Tuin.

Rattus rattus (Linnaeus, 1758) Black Rat
Swart rot

One specimen of this exotic species was collected in an uninhabited cottage near the office block.

Rhabdomys pumilio (Sparman, 1784) Striped Mouse
Kaapse Streepmuis

Found throughout the BNP but particularly numerous in the riverine vegetation and *Acacia karroo* thickets. Twenty animals were collected.

Mus minutoides (A. Smith, 1834) Dwarf Mouse
Dwergmuis

One specimen was taken in rank vegetation on the bank of the Breede River at Lang Elsieskraal.

Mus musculus (Linnaeus, 1758) House Mouse
Huismuis

No specimens have been taken during the present survey, though its presence was reported by De Graaff (1974). This was confirmed by trapping this species in the Park subsequent to this survey.

Dendromus melanotis (A. Smith, 1834) Grass Climbing Mouse
Grasklimmuis

During a frog-trapping operation one of the authors (H.B.) caught several *D. melanotis* in pit traps at Ou Tuin. One specimen was collected during the intensive survey.

Otomys irroratus (Brants, 1827) Vlei Rat
Vleirot

Restricted to the vicinity of the Breede River wherever the vegetation is suitable. Runways are numerous at Ou Tuin, where two specimens were collected.

Tatera afra (Gray, 1830) Cape Gerbil
Kaapse Nagmuis

Specimens were collected in the vicinity of the pumphouse on the Breede River. Burrow systems are particularly numerous in the sandy soils in the vicinity of the river.

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